

HANDHELDS

FAQ

Q I've heard that GPS devices can download traffic information and display it on their screens. How does this work, and what do I need to download it?

A The GPS signal tells you where you are, but it doesn't carry any extra information. To receive traffic data, you need a general packet radio service (GPRS) or 3G connection and GPS software that supports traffic information.

This is easy to set up on smartphone-based GPS systems, as the software can use the phone's data connection to download the information. If you use a PDA or a standalone GPS system for your navigation, you'll need to connect it to a GPRS-enabled mobile phone with Bluetooth.

Some navigation services, such as TomTom, provide traffic information if you subscribe to their premium services, but others, such as Navicore, provide the information for free. In both cases, you have to pay for the data that you download.

Chris Finnamore
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MIO A201

★★★★

£300 inc VAT

The A201 GPS PDA is the replacement for Mio's great-value 168. It's a GPS and PDA combination, so you can use it to find your way home and as a diary and a place to store all your contacts.

The A201 is slightly thicker than a normal PDA, but it's still compact. It feels better-made than its predecessor, as it's built from tough-feeling plastic. The 168's flimsy antenna was one of its weak points, but the A201's has a durable-feeling hinge and locks into place with a firm click. The antenna rotates on its hinge to get the best GPS reception, but the added bulk means the PDA wobbles when you try to use it on a desk. The joystick below the screen is a disappointment, as it is too short to be easy to use and has a spongy action.

High-end PDAs such as Dell's X51v have high-resolution 480x640 displays, but the A201 makes do with a standard 320x240 LCD. The screen is bright and has excellent viewing angles, making it ideal for mounting in a car, but it has a slightly grainy texture. The screen's surface is also quite rough, so scrolling up and down with the stylus can set your teeth on edge.

The A201 comes with the latest Windows Mobile 5 operating system, and the PDA is fast enough to run the OS smoothly. Unfortunately, with the Mio Map 2.0 navigation software installed, only 12MB of the PDA's 64MB storage is available for your documents. However, Mio provides the A201 with a 512MB SD card and



SUMMARY

- ✓ Accurate navigation
- ✓ Good value
- ✗ Sluggish software

GPS PDA Mio Map 2.0 software, UK, Ireland and EU maps (UK and Ireland pre-installed), 512MB SD card, SifStar III GPS receiver, Windows Mobile 5.0, 3 1/2" 320x240 LCD, 312MHz Intel PXA270 processor, 64MB RAM, 64MB storage (12MB available), Bluetooth, SD / MMC card slot, weighs 147g
PART CODE A201
SUPPLIER www.globalpositioning-systems.co.uk
DETAILS www.mio-tech.be

maps for all of Europe, which goes some way towards making up for this.

Mio Map 2.0 is based on the Navigon mapping software. To enter an address to navigate to, you have to enter a city or the first four characters of a postcode, followed by the street name and number. You can't just type in a street name and choose the correct road from a list, which makes it hard to navigate to roads in the country if you don't know their postcode or nearest town. The software is easy to use but runs very slowly; when typing in postcodes or street names, the unit takes an age to catch up with you. We didn't have these problems with the 168.

The A201 found a GPS fix in less than a minute, and route-planning is significantly faster than the 168. Plotting a route from the *Shopper* offices in the West End to South London took 12 seconds, and planning a trip to Edinburgh took one minute and 30 seconds, a full minute less than the 168. This is still far slower than many GPS systems, though.

On the road, the A201's clear maps and excellent voice prompts make navigation easy, but the 3D display is jerky, which wasn't a problem on the 168. Fortunately, the 2D view is fine.

Mio's A201 is better built than its predecessor and has the advantage of the latest Windows Mobile 5 OS. It is still excellent value for a Europe-wide GPS system, but while it plots routes quickly, it runs the Navigon software much slower than the 168.

Chris Finnamore

Also consider...

TOMTOM Navigator 5 Navigation Pack

★★★★★

£370 inc VAT



TomTom's navigation pack includes an HP iPAQ PDA, a Bluetooth GPS receiver and version 5 of TomTom's Navigator software. The kit is easy to set up; the software installs from the supplied SD card and is configured to pair with the Bluetooth receiver included. The software is easy to use, with voice prompts and a clear display. This is a great-value PDA and navigation device.



GPS NAVIGATION PACK GPS navigation kit, HP iPAQ hx2110 PDA, TomTom Bluetooth GPS receiver, TomTom Navigator 5 software, windscreen/dash-board mount SUPPLIER www.mobilefun.co.uk
DETAILS www.tomtom.com ✓ Fast route calculation
✗ Quiet speaker FULL REVIEW Feb 2006

ACER n300 400MHz

★★★★★

£300 inc VAT

Acer's n300 is the replacement for its previous high-end PDA, the n50. It's slimmer than the n50, has a higher-resolution 640x480 resolution screen and runs Windows Mobile 5. Connecting to the web is easy using the integrated 802.11b wireless networking and Bluetooth. It has 128MB of persistent memory to store programs and data. It's more expensive and not as powerful as Dell's Axim X51v, but it's slimmer, lighter and looks far better.



PDA Windows Mobile 5.0, 3.7" 480x640 LCD, 400MHz Samsung S3C2440 processor, 64MB RAM, 128MB storage (85MB available), Bluetooth, infrared, 802.11b WiFi, SD/MMC slot PART CODE n300
SUPPLIER www.morecomputers.com DETAILS www.acer.co.uk
✓ Slim and light; high-resolution screen ✗ Not quite as fast as Dell's Axim X51v FULL REVIEW May 2006

ASUS MyPal A636

★★★★

£323 inc VAT

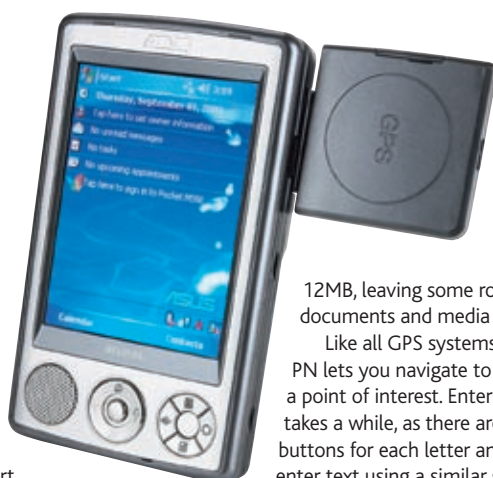
Like Mio's A201 (opposite), Asus's MyPal A636 is a PDA with a built-in SifStar III GPS receiver. It is supplied with the Pocket PC version of Destinator's mapping software.

The A636 looks big, but is almost the same size as the A201. It's heavy for a PDA at 186g and not particularly attractive, but it feels well built apart from the slightly rattling antenna. Unusually, the antenna folds out to the side rather than up, but it sits flush with the back of the PDA so you can use it on a desk without a wobble.

The A636's screen has the standard 240x320 resolution but is incredibly bright, so it's easy to see the screen even in bright sunlight. The viewing angles aren't as wide as Mio's A201, though.

Below the screen are the speaker, the directional pad and short cut buttons. The speaker is the loudest we have heard on a PDA, so you should be able to hear navigation directions over the car stereo or with the windows open. The directional pad under the screen is easier to use than a joystick, but the short cut buttons are too small for people with large fingers.

The Destinator PN mapping software is supplied on a 256MB SD card, along with UK and Ireland maps. The size of the supplied card means there is no room for more maps, but at least the A636 has 49MB of built-in storage available, compared to the Mio A201's



12MB, leaving some room for documents and media files.

Like all GPS systems, Destinator PN lets you navigate to an address or a point of interest. Entering addresses takes a while, as there aren't separate buttons for each letter and you have to enter text using a similar system to a mobile phone. As with the A201, you

have to enter the city or postcode first, followed by the street name.

The A636 takes only 30 seconds to get a GPS fix, and was quick to calculate our test routes. It took just 13 seconds to plan a route from central London to South London and 27 seconds to plot a journey from London to Edinburgh, which makes it one of the fastest GPS systems we have seen.

The navigation screen has tiny icons, so it is not possible to change from 2D to 3D views when driving, but there is plenty of room for the large and clear navigation display. The Destinator software is excellent, giving clear directions and coping especially well with complicated junctions.

Asus's A636 is a competent PDA with slightly fiddly but accurate mapping software. It is harder to use than Mio's A201, but much faster, although its 256MB SD card and lack of European maps mean it can't compete on value.

Chris Finnamore

SUMMARY

- ✓ Accurate mapping
- ✓ Loud speaker
- ✗ GPS only covers UK and Ireland

GPS PDA Destinator PN mapping software, SifStar III GPS receiver, UK and Ireland maps, 256MB SD card, Windows Mobile 5.0, 3.5" 320x240 LCD, 416MHz Intel XScale PXA272 processor, 64MB RAM, 64MB storage (49MB available), Bluetooth, infrared, 802.11b WiFi, SD/MMC card slot, weighs 186g
PART CODE A636
SUPPLIER www.digiuk.com
DETAILS uk.asus.com

CHOOSING... GPS Kit

Follow the steps to find your ideal specs

PDA: Pocket PC or Palm OS

GPS RECEIVER: Wired or built in

MAP COVERAGE: UK

TRAFFIC DATA: No

1 If you want a satellite navigation system, you don't have to have it built into your car for a four-figure sum. A PDA, GPS receiver and software with routing abilities can do the job better for as little as £290.

The receiver is usually a black box the size of a matchbox but some PDAs have a receiver and aerial built in. All the popular software packages allow you to navigate to a location by entering its address or by finding it on a map.

2 A PDA bought to run navigation software will also offer all the usual PDA functions, so you can use it for work when you're not driving. GPS software is available for both the Palm and Pocket PC platforms. If you choose to buy a bundle it is wise to check the model of PDA included and look at its reviews. Some suppliers may bundle grey imports or discontinued models in order to offer a lower price.

If you're not interested in having a PDA, a dedicated navigation device, such as TomTom Go, should save you a bit of cash.

3 Bluetooth GPS receivers transfer data wirelessly to your PDA and reduce the number of cables cluttering up your car. The cost is significantly higher because you need a PDA with Bluetooth capability, and there's another battery to keep charged. Look for a car kit with your Bluetooth receiver, so that you can wire it into your car's power and keep it permanently charged.

4 Two popular bundled software packages are TomTom Navigator 5 and Navman Smart ST Pro 3. They both include 3D views and allow you to navigate according to address.

5 Real-time traffic updates automatically update your route based on traffic information. This is a useful feature, but you'll need a GPRS or 3G mobile connection to use the service. You'll have to pay for the data you download, which is charged by your mobile operator by the megabyte. You may also have to pay a subscription charge for the service. This adds to the cost because data must be subscribed to and downloaded using a mobile phone.

SONY ERICSSON W800i

★★★★★

PRICE CUT!

£230 inc VAT SIM-free; from free to £170 inc VAT on contract

This is a superb music player and phone in one. Transferring music to the phone is easy using the supplied software, and the music-playing application is excellent. Sound quality from the headphones is superb, and the autofocus camera is the best we have seen on a phone, especially at night.



MOBILE PHONE Music phone, tri-band, 400 hours standby, 540 minutes of talk time, Bluetooth/IR connectivity, radio, 512MB memory Stick Duo, 176x200 pixel display, 99g, 100x46x20.5mm (HWD) PART CODE W800 SUPPLIER www.expansys.com (SIM-free); Orange/Vodafone/O2/T-Mobile/Virgin (contract) DETAILS www.sonyericsson.co.uk ✓ Superb sound quality ✓ Stiff keypad buttons FULL REVIEW Dec 2005

DELL Axim X51v 624MHz

★★★★★

PRICE CUT!

£262 inc VAT

Dell's Axim X51v is an update to the Axim X50v, previously the fastest handheld you could buy. The X51v shares the X50's powerful 624MHz processor and Intel 3D graphics, but it comes with Windows Mobile 5.

The X51v can connect to the internet using its built-in wireless networking or via a Bluetooth mobile phone. It also has persistent memory, so you won't lose your data if the PDA runs out of battery power. It is expensive, but no PDA is faster or has more features.



PDA Windows Mobile 5, 3.7" 480x640 LCD, 624MHz Intel XScale processor, 64MB RAM, 256MB storage (195MB available), Bluetooth, infrared, 802.11b, SD/MMC slot, CF slot PART CODE X51v SUPPLIER Dell 08709 075818 DETAILS www.dell.co.uk ✓ Powerful, with an excellent screen ✓ Expensive FULL REVIEW Apr 2006